

# Sanskrit Lesson

## Amítabha Sutra

by Bhikshuni Heng Hsien

एवंप्रमुखाः शरिपुत्र पूर्वस्यां दिशि

गङ्गानदीवालुकौपमा नुडा भगवन्तः

evampramukhāḥ śāriputra pūrvasyām

diśi gāṅgānadīvālukopamā Buddhā

Bhagavantaḥ •

"...with such Leaders, Śāriputra, in the eastern direction the Buddhas, World Honored Ones, comparable to Ganges River sand..."

This continues the list in section 10 of the Buddhas in the East. *evampramukhāḥ* comes after naming the most important Buddhas of that direction, and it is a possessive adjective compound agreeing with the subject (of the main verb yet to come): *buddhā* (*buddhās* before external sandhi). It is composed of the noun *mukha* "mouth/face/door," hence "head/top/chief," which combines with the prefix *pra-* "very" to make the adjective here used as a substantive meaning "chief/leader(s)" as final member of the compound which has the indeclinable *evam* "such/thus" as its first element--used in the same way as in *evamrūpaiḥ* of the refrain to sections 3-7 and 8, that is, as an adjective modifying the second member: "such Leaders." "With" is the translation of the possessive idea inherent in such compounds: the Buddhas have such Buddhas as previously named at their head. The noun *bhagavantaḥ* (*bhagavantas*) is in apposition to *buddhāḥ*, all three words being in the nominative plural masculine. Note that the possessive suffix *-vant* terminates this noun, which therefore has *-vān* (long *ā* in the nominative singular masculine) and *-vantas* as the nominative plural masculine. Participles in *-ant*, by contrast, have short *a* in the first case and lack *n* in the second.

*pūrvasyām* is locative singular feminine of adjective *pūrva* "before/in front/east" (uses the promominal declension when stating relative location). It agrees with the feminine noun *diś* "direction," from the root *√diś-* "to point."

Another possessive adjective compound in agreement with *buddhāḥ* is *gāṅgānadīvālukopamā(h)* which is composed of four nouns: *gāṅgā* (fem.) the Ganges, *nadī* (fem.) "river," *vālukā* (fem.) "sand," and *upamā* (fem.) "comparison/simile." Even though the members of the compound are all feminine nouns, the possessive adjective itself is masculine, for it modifies the masculine

noun *buddhāḥ* and means Buddhas "possessing" (or) "with as their comparison sand of the Ganges River," that is, equal in number to the amount of grains of sand in the Ganges River, noted for its extremely fine and so extremely numerous grains of sand.

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